

***Heather's Hound***  
***Nadya***

**Louis Arthur  
Cunningham**

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*Title:* Heather's Hound Nadya

*Date of first publication:* 1930

*Author:* Louis Arthur Cunningham (1900-1954)

*Illustrator:* Orison MacPherson (1898-1966)

*Date first posted:* Sep. 4, 2022

*Date last updated:* Sep. 4, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220910

This eBook was produced by: John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# Heather's Hound Nadya

By LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

*The story of a conquest at love that began with victory and ended in defeat*

Illustrated by ORISON MACPHERSON

**T**his was in autumn, when the little man who wears a trailing coat of tinted maple leaves and a beard of long moss was just making his rounds, touching the trees with his staff to make their leaves change color. Soon, thought Michael, the river would be a goodly sight, so wide and chilly blue in the early mornings, and its banks all yellow and crimson. Then, having tasted this bit of whimsy, he went back again to Stevenson and that striking reflection on marriage: "And while I may still continue by my inconsiderate and violent life to spread havoc throughout man's confederacy, I can do so no more (who am married), at least, in ignorance and levity; one face shall wince before me in the flesh . . ."

"It's well put," said he. "And there's some symbolism in my striking it first thing I opened the book; 'One face shall wince before me in the flesh. . .'"

A car turned in off the Rothesay Road, began to climb the rutted track up the lane. Nadya's lemon-colored ears stood up sharp and stiff; then, with incredible litheness, she rose from the shaven sward at Michael's feet, and her long-legged, exquisitely symmetric shadow was gigantic on the grass. Nadya was Heather's hound; a borzoi of patrician elegance, with eyes that held in their dark amber depths the sorrows of all the Romanoffs.

"This shouldn't be Heather," said Michael, recollecting that Heather, when she was leaving to take the motor-bus to town, had bade him earnestly to shave, to discard his ancient tweeds and don flannels and look human. "But you should know, Nadya," he said seriously, wishing he had done as Heather had suggested. Yes, there had been something behind Heather's suggestion. He might have guessed it when she left her own car and rode in on the bus.

“Much like a Michael Arlen heroine,” said Michael. “Something . . . you know, Nadya . . . with the grace of a greyhound, driving a rapierlike roadster. But who, enfin, is this that Heather brings into the wilderness?”

Nadya, giving no answer, watched the car’s rapid climb up the narrow road, the wild growth at the sides swishing and bending away from its fenders, arched and gleaming. It was a long, grey and blue and silver thing. And the girl who drove it, she by whom sat Heather, clad in a yellow jersey, was dressed in vivid blue; and her face, he knew even before he saw it distinctly, was oval and pallid, and she was ash-blonde of hair, and was somehow a reincarnation of a woman he had known many hundreds of years ago, perhaps in some spired town along the Danube, perhaps in some bandit’s fastness in the Ural mountains, perhaps in some old ivied town of England.

Ah yes, she would be tall and walk with a swinging, fascinating grace, with her fine head held high, and her name would be . . . of course . . .

“Ora Dean.” Heather said it. And something deep in Michael’s heart said: “To be sure . . . Ora Dean.”

“Michael, you are hopeless.” Heather, who was sturdy and nut-brown and matter-of-fact and very much a-year-married, went on to say: “I didn’t want Ora to see you looking like a hermit.”

“But I had pictured you even as you are—Michael,” said Ora Dean. “You see, I’ve read every book you’ve written; read into your books, and through them into you. Really, Heather—” Her great eyes shifted from their intent recognitory look into Michael’s, smoothly to meet Heather’s, of deeper blue than hers. “Really, I should have been disappointed to find him spick and span in flannels.”

“Thank you,” grinned Michael.

“I love your borzoi.” Ora Dean’s hand went out carelessly to stroke Nadya’s ear.

Have you seen, perchance, a steel trap spring? You have a faint idea then of the lightning twist of long muscular neck, the awful champing of great teeth. The tall girl’s hand bled, and her lip, where she bit it, almost bled.

“I should have known better,” she said calmly. “I really know the breed quite well. It’s nothing anyway.” Her face was ashen. She dabbled at the wound with a tiny pale blue kerchief.

Michael and Heather were dumbfounded. Nadya the sedate, the exquisite and reserved, never before in all her three years had so much as snarled at any one, guest or stranger. And Ora was lovely, so dazzlingly lovely.

“I’ll discipline her,” said Michael. “It must have been jealousy. She’s Heather’s dog, Ora. She worships Heather. And she’s good; always has been till now. But they know women, she dogs do, and resent lovely ones sometimes.”

“You shine, Michael,” said Heather approvingly. “It was well put, sir. Nadya, you’re hateful, nasty; a bad hound!”

Nadya stood unabashed; her lips curled and uncurled in that ghastly grinning fashion that is a borzoi’s own. Michael’s brown fingers were twined in her collar. Her eyes did not swerve from Ora’s face.

“Come, Ora,” urged Heather. “You’d better wash that cut and I’ll dress it for you. I’ll punish Nadya. But she’ll soon get to know you.”

“Don’t, please,” said Ora. “You mustn’t punish her. I should have waited a while before getting so familiar. Eh, Nadya?” Deftly she reached behind Nadya’s ear and scratched there lightly. Nadya, still growling, submitted. “We’ll get along, you see if we don’t,” said Ora. “Nadya and I will be the best of friends.”

**S**he went into the house with Heather then; but something of her blue-black eyes, her pallid hair and lovely face still lingered with Michael, as he watched her and Heather climb the steps. Heather had always amply taken care of the woman hunger in his life. He was utterly satisfied with Heather, but he could still appreciate and enjoy such beauty as Ora Dean’s. He was glad Heather had brought her; and that night after dinner, instead of going—like a bear rolling into his den, Heather said—to his study, he stayed late on the verandah with his wife and her guest, and he thought the new moon’s silver crescent more beautiful than of old, and he thought on life full pleasantly. Ora Dean’s eyes were on him when he met them. And he knew that she, too, remembered dimly, joyously, that long, long age ago when they had known each other, had perhaps—what treason!—loved . . .

Ora Dean, Michael, listening, learned, had gone to boarding-school with Heather, to some quaint school along the St. Lawrence, and there had they shared life as only youth can. They had so many things to talk about; some girl’s name and—“Can you imagine what she’s doing now?”

Michael enjoyed it. Often he had heard Heather mention Ora Dean, but names could not make people real to him. Ora Dean had been only a name floating far back in the mists of his soul; now it had formed into beauty, blonde and blue, and, to him, fascinating in a way he could not name but which involved no disloyalty to Heather, long since a part of his being whom not to love meant to perish.

And yet he wished—as the days went by, and Ora, with little urging, stayed and became one of them—that Heather would not go to the city so often and leave Ora there alone with him. He would be in his own room, certainly; but he was conscious of Ora's being in the house, in the garden. He would find himself gazing out of his study window at the tall trellis across the lawn where the sweet peas had climbed up so strongly, and where, often, in the shadow, Ora sat and read, her long slim legs crossed, her hair like a pale halo against the blue cushion on which her head rested.

He found Ora intruding on his work—the thought of her, for she never bothered him in person. Indeed, Heather would go off without telling Michael that Ora was staying home. Once she said:

“You don't need to chuck work to entertain Ora. She gets along quite well by herself. Of course, if you ever feel like going for a tramp or playing tennis, you will find her more than willing to go with you. She rather idolizes you, old bear.”

“Bosh!” said Michael. “But I'm glad Nadya doesn't growl at her any more. Nadya's a queer one, and there's no reading her whims. However, I can't ditch work these days to play around with your guest, much as I'd like to, Heather.”

Accordingly, the next morning, which had the golden radiance of a sunburst, Michael flung down his pen on the blank white sheet where words had refused to form and went out of the house and across the lawn to where Ora was sitting.

Her eyes said as clearly as speech: “I was waiting for you, hoping you'd come. Why didn't you come long ago?”

“Heather leaves you pretty much alone,” said Michael, standing above her. “Would you care to walk with me? We can go up the track through the woods to the orchard, cut across the links, and come out on the highroad by Riverside Station.”

“The gods must have told me to wear brogues this morning,” said Ora. Her teeth were milky, a uniform line of white under full red lips. Her skin

did not burn, did not tan except lightly, and it was flawless, the brow high and wide. Her hair was full and long on one side, and she would shake it back with a toss of her head.

They strolled away. Nadya's tread was soundless on the sward. She muzzled Michael's hand and he stopped.

"Oh-ho! I thought you had gone with Heather, Miss Elegance. No one invited you to walk. Do you mind her coming with us, Ora?"

"Far, far from it. Do let her come."

Nadya loped along at their heels, up the narrow wagon track to the orchard, where the boughs were bent with great red apples and the grass was high to one's waist. There was a spring there, clear and icy on the hottest days, and Ora wanted to drink. Nor would she wait till Michael fashioned her a cup of birchbark. She got down on her knees, and the bank was steep and it seemed she would slip in. He knelt beside her and held her.

"Thanks." She turned her head; her face was close, close to his. "I'm not afraid now."

"No?" said Michael. "Well, I am."

She laughed and stooped to drink. She arose with Michael's help and they went on their way; but they were not the same, nor was that which was between them the same.

He knew. He had wanted very much to hold her close to him, to kiss that perfect curving mouth, feel her cheek against his, her hair brushing his eyes. And that wasn't right, that was cheating, and above all it was silly. He felt angry at Heather for leaving them alone. He made up his mind that this wouldn't happen again. Really, Heather should have more sense. He was only human. Just like Heather not to think of a thing like that. Why, in just such a way had other happy marriages begun to be undermined . . .

Hateful thoughts of what might be trooped and crowded into his head. Suppose he came to love this girl, suppose he left Heather for her—"One face would wince before me in the flesh."

His fingers moved in the thick hair of Nadya's back—Heather's dog, loved by Heather, with eyes, large, patient, steady, like Heather's. Ora was light-hearted, so sure of herself. He felt less a man, and yet he knew that it must come soon, that kiss. And whither would it lead? It might take him anywhere; to ecstasy, to misery, to an unknowable change from his placid, satisfied, regular life with Heather. To write a book, to write another book—

his aim had been only that, and with her this past year he had known much content. But it was, he began to feel, a dull, vegetative existence. He was dodging the life he wrote about. And Ora had come, out of the ages lost, to draw him back into life.

They sat quietly that night, after dinner, on the verandah, watching the river that had been a black and crimson plane of sunset and now was one of silver. Ora sat in a deep wicker chair, and Michael sat with Heather on the swinging seat, Nadya between them, her long head in Heather's lap. The spell of Ora was not so strong then.

"You're both idolaters," said Ora. "You adore that borzoi."

"Oh, yes," said Michael quickly. "She sort of brought us together. Dogs were always a religion with me. Heather didn't like them—till I brought Nadya to her. Nadya was small and round and funny then. She grew up with us, shared our secrets. She has a soul, too."

Ora said nothing. Nadya's great eyes were always fastened on her. It was absurd canine jealousy, Michael said, and Heather agreed. Ora's advances were received with lessening suspicion by the huge hound, but she would not go with Ora unless the leash was on her. Ora, at Heather's urging, took her for a walk in the woods, and Michael was glad to see them together. He, loving Ora now, familiar with her lips, telling her things that he had told before in days that he regretted losing yet could not seem to hold—he could not understand why Nadya did not love this woman, all beauty and wondrous charm, as he loved her.

Nadya came limping back that day, holding her left hind paw high and showing misery in her eyes. Heather ran to her, and Michael, concerned, went too. They knelt beside her, fondled her. There was a gash in the borzoi's slender leg and the paw dangled pitifully. Michael, looked up from his scrutiny of the wound and saw that Ora's hand bled. She was trying to hide it.

"Did Nadya snap you again?" he said angrily. "This is too much . . ."

"When a dog is hurt it can't discriminate too well between friend and enemy," said Ora earnestly. "She leaped down that steep bank above the orchard after a rabbit, I think, and the rocks were dislodged and one got her. She tumbled over and had a bad fall."

"Tracherous, though, to bite you," said Michael. "It's not like her. Well, drag out the iodine, Heather, and we'll make her smart."



Together they doctored Nadya, after Ora's hand had been bathed and treated. They hated to see Nadya suffer. She didn't whine or complain or seek to draw the foot away from Michael's hand when he poured the stinging iodine into the cut and bandaged it. She lay on the grass, looking from Michael to Heather with unfathomable, pleading eyes.

**A**fter that day, she would not go with Ora unless Michael went too. And Michael did not want Nadya. The borzoi's eyes were searching, uncanny, often accusing. Michael hated to see her eyes. They rebuked him. It was nonsense, he told himself. What could a dog know of this that had come to him and Ora Dean; this love, so new, so thrilling, so far more wonderful than anything he had believed in life could ever be.

It was Ora now. It had to be Ora. It would be she always. They talked it over frankly. Heather was about her business—golf or bridge or dancing—things Ora did not care for. Heather suspected nothing; for in Michael's manner there was little change. He had always been pensive, sparing of words. He was aloof with Ora when Heather was there to see. And only when Heather was there did he feel a sense of guilt, of pain. He told himself it must not be. His life and Heather's would go smash if he went away with Ora. And to that it was coming, swiftly, inevitably.



*“We can’t go on like this, Ora,” he said one day as they sat under the trees in the orchard. “Heather is to blame.” replied the girl. “She forgets that we are only human.”*

“We can’t go on like this, Ora,” he said one day as they sat in the deep grass under the orchard trees. “It’s not human, you know. I love you. It must be love that has uprooted all the solid and seemingly permanent things in my life. I should have known better than to attribute solidity or permanency to anything. Life laughs at people who take it for granted and think to make a mechanical parade out of it. I thought my days would be all the same. I thought I was happy.”

“Happy!” Ora laughed. Her long fingers ruffled his hair, smoothed his bronzed cheek. “You were merely in a comatose, lazy state, my dear Michael. The life you lead here is bound to make you stodgy. It conduces to fatness, mental and physical, though you are quite lean, I’ll grant you. But you wouldn’t want to go on like this. You’re so young, and life can give you so much if you’ll go out and take it. Heather is sweet, but she was always too placid, too forthright and unimaginative. Look at her now—leaving you and me always alone together, never caring what we do. Only Heather, among women, could fail to see what such propinquity must accomplish. You know what it has done. It has made me love you, want you more than life or honor or anything.”

“I know. It’s the same with me. I don’t care. I know it will hurt her, cut her to the heart . . .”

“But she is to blame. She forgets that we are only human. I never knew love until now. And you—I don’t think you did either.”

“I thought I did. I couldn’t have. I thought Heather was the perfect balance for me. It seemed to work out. Her mind is steady where mine is erratic; she has the hard-headed common sense which I lack; antithetical qualities. But your nature seems more the complement of mine; mystical, fatalistic, strongly imaginative. You talk and think coolly, as I do, of running away, of casting off your moorings, leaving safe harbor and braving the seas of contempt and derision.”

“A world of fools,” said Ora. “Why should we care. Don’t we know?”

“Yes, I think we know . . . that we love.”

**T**his was a frowning October afternoon, grey, sombre, chill; and the wind about the eaves of Michael’s cottage wailed, he fancied, a dirge for the love of Heather that was no more; and in the wide chimney it rumbled ominously of the future. But he did not fear the future when he looked at Ora, going so calmly about packing her bags, taking him already for granted as her own. And, looking at her—so tall, aureately fair, blue-eyed, child-eyed—he reflected on how little yet how much it takes to change the currents of men’s lives. A woman, this, even as Heather; and yet . . .

Nadya lay curled up on the rug in Heather’s room and did not come out. Michael was glad. He hated to see Nadya. It sickened his heart to see her—her eyes so steadily watchful, her noble head resting on her paws as if bowed in lament—Nadya, who was only a dog and could not know that this was treachery.

“But,” muttered Michael, “the thing, the thoughts that Nadya brings to me! Heather . . .” His eyes dimmed, and once more in that house where Ora whom he now loved was, he knew the old sensation of loss that had been his when Heather was down in that shadowed valley whence women come bearing a small sweet likeness or in which they stay for aye. Michael knew that lost, abysmal feeling, and was as a blind man wandering in the wind over downs girt by cliffs.

He threw off that horrid load. It would be worse misery to stay, missing Ora and wanting her always. He was going. For a moment he must see Nadya—Heather’s hound, whom he loved well, whom Heather loved with a

great love. He must stroke Nadya's head, look into her eyes to see what always he had seen there—sorrow beyond all naming, and loyalty beyond all knowing, and trust beyond betrayal.

Michael said what was half prayer, half blasphemy. But his life and Heather's life and Nadya's life were one. Silent, Nadya shared all with them. Could she be sharing this? Would she, were such power given her, plead with him and seek to hold him to her whom she must now serve alone? Nadya only looked at Michael and licked his hand lightly.

Then he went, carrying some bags to the car. Then he came back, passing by the rear of the cottage to see—just little things—the rock-garden where Heather's small hands had delved black earth and piled coarse granite. She had knelt there, and, kneeling, had looked over her shoulder and up at him, smiling, laughing deep down in her bright eyes.

Going from there, he passed the window of her room and paused to look in.

“Curse you!” he said fiercely. “You . . .”

Ora, in the room, saw him but not in time to stop her foot that kicked at Nadya's leg where the wound was. Brogues she wore; and the hound, baring its fangs, still cowered away from her and winced before her even as Heather, whom he was kicking and trampling in the dust, would wince. And he was no better than Ora Dean, no less cowardly, no less a traitor; he injured the weak, the defenseless, and lusted in the injury.

He came to Ora quickly, and looked at her with a slow smile, a noiseless laugh, contempt in his dark eyes.

“You kicked Heather's hound,” he said. “Hate her, don't you?”

“You know I do, Michael.” She saw she had lost; there was no mistaking the fact that he had turned against her. “She tried to maim me . . .”

“She knew you—better than I did—better than Heather did. But it wasn't for that you hated her. Shall I tell you why? You saw in her something you could not destroy; the one thing common to my wife and me that you could not stamp out nor thrust aside; a link that could not be broken. Shall you go alone or do you want to take leave of Heather? I am going out now.”

“I'll wait. I'll go tonight. I'll tell her I was called away.”

Ora Dean had gone, and in Michael's heart there was no sense of loss. Gladness, the strong, splendid, well-known joys of his ordered life, left no room for loss. There was none anyway. One day he looked up from his work to see Heather standing above him, her eyes good to see. Their hands met, his left over his right shoulder to meet her twining fingers.

“Ora's gone now. Did you not notice, Michael, my leaving her with you so much? I thought—read it somewhere—that an artist of any sort must have variety in women, must not be tied too much to one. So I gave you her society. But I knew how it would be. You scarcely looked at her, you were hardly aware of her existence. But I was glad I had given you the chance; thought perhaps you were weary of me and could make a better go of life with her. It was silly of me . . .”

“Very,” said Michael softly. “More silly, Heather, than you can ever know.”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

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[The end of *Heather's Hound Nadya* by Louis Arthur Cunningham]